

**THE LIFE OF IAMSLIC; FROM OUR PAINLESS BIRTH, THROUGH A  
SOMETIMES TUMULTUOUS ADOLESCENCE TO THE MATURE,  
SUBSTANTIVE, OCCASIONALLY DYSFUNCTIONAL, FAMILY WE ARE  
TODAY**

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Abstract: An unflinching look at the 32 year evolution of our organization, warts and all.

**The Beginning**

Our organization has now moved into its fourth decade of existence and this year our executive board decided I was the ideal person to make a presentation on the history of the organization – ideal, I suppose, because I’m the last active charter member of the organization not yet on life support.

Our founder, Carol Winn, now retired on Cape Cod and volunteering at the MBL/WHOI library, was very helpful to me in preparing this presentation. I stopped in Woods Hole, Massachusetts in June 2006 to look through the archives of IAMSLIC and met Carol for lunch. It was great talking with about her vision for our group. In 1975, Carol was hired as the Research Librarian at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Feeling a bit out of her element, she “needed help” and decided to get input from other marine librarians by organizing a 2 day meeting. Carol used library addresses on her interlibrary loan list to send invitations to librarians on the east coast of the United States and Canada and Bermuda. Twenty-three librarians traveled to Woods Hole that year to attend the first meeting of the East Coast Marine Science Librarians, hosted by Carol Winn of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and Jane Fessenden of the Marine Biological Laboratory. Marine librarians from the local area increased the number of attendees to 49.

We met in a drafty, freezing cold, wooden building in Woods Hole and were served homemade tomato soup. The printed program was nothing more than a list of possible topics to be discussed. Consequently, the first meeting was very casual and loosely organized with a very fluid agenda.

**Chronology**

By the following October, the group had voted to name the organization the Marine Science Librarians Association. The 1976 meeting in Woods Hole had 72 participants. For the first time, there was a registration fee of \$16. With funding from Sea Grant, a

directory of member libraries was published and distributed. There was a demonstration of the Biosis electronic database from Dialog Information Services performed on a Texas Instruments Silent 700 terminal with the telephone receiver plugged into an acoustic coupler. The electronic age in marine libraries had officially been launched.

In 1977, the meeting was held in Washington D.C. and hosted by NOAA librarians. Many attendees felt that the program that year was much too focused on government libraries and there were fears that some attendees would not return the following year. A decision was made at this conference to become a formal not for profit organization. Six years later, we would still be fighting to get tax exempt status.

The conference returned to Woods Hole in 1978 and we became an increasingly formal organization. We were now holding elections of officers and drafting bylaws and articles of incorporation. After much discussion, the organization's name was changed to the International Association of Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers. Frances Swim became the first elected President, following founder Carol Winn's three year tenure as convener. The following year, Treasurer Marilyn Guin announced at our conference in Charleston, South Carolina that she had arranged for incorporation in the state of Oregon.

Gathering in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in October of 1980, we held a joint meeting with the Association of Earth Science Editors. A new Directory of Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers was published and available for sale.

The conference expanded to 3 full days for the first time in 1981. Hosted by Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, California, the meetings were increasingly about computer related topics. Archives were established this year and have been housed ever since at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts. In the mid 1980's, President Ruth Grundy suggested we publish our conference proceedings and create a position for a proceedings editor. The proceedings were to be abstracted in Oceanic Abstracts and Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts. A heated discussion ensued over the suggestion that the proceedings be abstracted in the National Technical Information Service (U.S.) database. Angrily, but appropriately, some Canadian members reminded us all, once again, that IAMSILIC is an international entity and not a United States organization.

Newport, Oregon was the site of the 1986 conference, where bylaws changes were approved, allowing for some travel expenses to be covered for officers and the newsletter and proceedings editor. A duplicate exchange program was established in 1987 and Omnet was adopted as our official method of electronic communication. Electronic mail would change the way we all do business.

The 1989 meeting in Bermuda capped a very big year for IAMSILIC. It marked our first conference to be held off the North American continent and our first president from outside North America, Cecile Thiery. It was also the first year that the

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Committee provided funding for 2 people to attend the conference. We discussed, heatedly and at length, adding the word “Aquatic” to our name. There were many who feared that the aquatic libraries would overtake the marine libraries; however, this has not happened, possibly because we’ve done a poor job of recruiting aquatic librarians to join our ranks. A very sad event also marked 1989 – the death of long time member, Marilyn Guin. In her memory, each year we hold a “Guin auction” to fund conference attendees from developing countries. Conference participants donate marine related items and gifts of regional interest to this silent auction each year.

By 1991, we were officially the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers. A “twinning” program was approved to provide a buddy system for supporting libraries from developing countries, libraries that might otherwise be unable to afford the cost of IAMSLIC membership. An ad hoc committee was formed to explore the possible use of the Internet as a means of IAMSLIC networking. For the first time in our history, a Russian member attended our annual conference, held that year in Galveston, Texas.

In the 1990s, we established more of a truly international presence. Our conference was held in Bremerhaven, Germany and for the first time, we were represented at a meeting of UNESCO’S Group of Experts on Marine Information Management (GEMIM) by Tom Moritz. The following year, Pauline Simpson represented us. Following this, we sent representatives to the meeting of the International Oceanographic Data Exchange (IODE). Natalie Wiest was the first attendee in 1996, followed by David Moulder and Pauline Simpson, representing the European Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centres (EURASLIC) and GEMIM.

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IAMSLIC was celebrated in Hawaii in 1994 where the program topics concentrated on the role of librarians in the information superhighway. Our organization has grown with and been transformed by the advent of electronic information.

Reykjavik, Iceland was the venue for the 1998 conference, providing the most unique and exotic meeting site to date. Sadly, another longtime member and former president, Ruth Grundy, died during the week of our meeting. 2001 found us convening in Brest, France at a joint conference with EURASLIC. Through the efforts of Ruth Gustafson and her team, the beta version of the new IAMSLIC website was unveiled.

Our first conference to be held in Latin America took place in 2002 in Mazatlan, Mexico. Papers and posters on resource sharing were shared, along with discussion of the newly launched IAMSLIC Z39.50 Distributed Library on the Internet. The Z library, as we call it, provides worldwide interlibrary loan and resource sharing to IAMSLIC member libraries. The Mazatlan conference is also remembered as having the most entertaining, elaborate and professional banquet floor show in the history of the organization. Tasmania, Australia provided an even farther flung venue for the 2004 conference, our

first meeting in the southern hemisphere. The focus of the meeting was open archives initiatives, but everyone still found time to get a glimpse of kangaroos, wombats and Tasmanian devils.

As I stood on the rooftop of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) looking over the beautiful city of Rome at the 2005 conference, I couldn't help but think that Carol Winn had probably never envisioned us in such grand surroundings. During our summer lunch, she told me that although her initial ambitions for the group didn't include an international presence, she is not surprised at all by the size and breadth of the organization since "obviously there was a need." Carol feels that one of the organization's great strengths is that we have always "embraced all oddballs", an observation she makes with affection regarding the great diversity of our members' skills and personalities.

### **Problems and Controversies**

Of course, we haven't survived 3 decades unscathed by problems and controversies. We are fortunate to be as large and active as we are considering that we have never done a really good job of recruiting members; despite adding aquatic to our name, the number of aquatic libraries in the organization is probably smaller than it should be. Over the years, we have had some testy exchanges and prickly relationships with both EURASLIC and the IOC. In the early years, there were occasional power struggles between the United States and Canadian members.

We have sadly lost several members much too early to cancer. Just about every possible library disaster has been experienced by our members – fire, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and mudslides. We are also not immune to interpersonal squabbles. Any conference that ends with the conference hosts and the conference convener still speaking to one another is considered a success.

We have also lost several members to downsizing by organizations whose lack of vision led to the elimination of the professional librarian position. The misinformed may believe that electronic information has replaced librarians, when actually the information age has simply produced another complex layer of information for librarians to understand, organize and manage.

### **Accomplishments**

The main accomplishment of IAMSLIC has been more than 30 years of education, cooperation and friendship. We have truly cooperated on an international level not only with one another, but with organizations such as GEMIM, the FAO, the IODE and the IOC. The new Aquatic Commons Initiative will greatly benefit our member libraries and their patrons.

Although regional groups in some parts of the world experienced problems in getting organized, today our regional groups are active and provide education and networking to many library professionals unable to participate in the annual conference. Additionally, they allow members to tackle problems of regional importance, though not necessarily of interest to the organization at large. Our quarterly newsletters and active online discussion list keep members informed and up to date.

The IAMSLLIC Z39.50 Distributed Library has enabled members around the world to access the materials of other member libraries. The original concept came from Ann Ball of the NOAA Coastal Services Center. In the past year, the “Z library” has enabled 68 lending libraries in 18 countries to fill requests from 101 libraries in 39 countries. This very successful project owes a special thanks to Steve Watkins for all his hard work and technical expertise.

### **In Conclusion**

IAMSLLIC would not flourish as it does today without an enormous amount of work from all its members who have volunteered their time as officers, conferences hosts and conveners, proceedings and newsletter editors, archivists, committee chairs and special project leaders.

A former president, Mary Jane Beardsley, summed up the greatest benefit of IAMSLLIC membership – enduring friendships. She said, “I still refer to the IAMSLLIC years as when I led an interesting life.” Thirty-two years after those 23 librarians traveled to Woods Hole in 1975, we’ve expanded, grown and traveled, but remain true to their cooperative spirit.